

January 26, 2015

Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children,

I am Kenia Mansilla-Rivera, MD, a family physician and Medical Student Director of the University of Connecticut school of Medicine, and a full time faculty in the Saint Francis Hospital and UConn Family Medicine Residency Program. I practice in the Family Medicine Center at Asylum Hill in Hartford, where we provide full scope family medicine. Our practice provides primary care to families, and about 40% of our visits are for children. Our population is primarily Medicaid and Medicare. We serve a variable community, majority of our patients are African American and Hispanics. Many of them do not speak English as their primary language. We also serve a small percent of a refugee population from different areas of Asia, Africa and Middle East. I am writing today in my role as physician that provide care to our underserved population in Hartford, to lend my support to Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program.

As a family physician, I view low literacy as a health problem. Poor literacy is a factor in health disparities. Reach Out and Read is a national program to promote literacy by changing the way physicians practice medicine. Reach Out and Read gives doctors an evidence-based strategy to promote child development and learning. The program is highly economical, requiring little infrastructure, providing books purchased at a sharply discounted rate and relying on pediatricians as an army of highly trained volunteers and trusted authorities to bring this important preventive strategy to families.

Many of our patients would not have books at all in their household without this program. Parents are taught to read to their children and spend time with them without spending any money that they don't have. A special bond is made when parents make a routine to read to their children. Reach Out and Read makes these special moments possible. As a parent myself of four children, I know that is a true statement.

The mission of Reach Out and Read is to make books and literacy guidance a routine part of primary care so that children grow up with a love of books and reading, with a special emphasis on children growing up in poverty. The Reach Out and Read model is a scientifically validated model to promote literacy skills beginning at the early age of 6 months. Fifteen peer-reviewed research studies demonstrate important positive outcomes when families receive books and guidance through the ROR program. These studies have been carried out in at least 10 different states, including Connecticut, with bilingual families, non-English speaking families and families for whom there are no books in the home language, yet the results are the same: Reach Out and Read families are significantly more likely to read to their children and to have more children's books in their homes. Of utmost importance, research documents that children served by the Reach Out and Read program show an increase of 4-8 points on vocabulary tests by the age of 2. For a two-year-old, this increase represents an approximately six-month gain, developmentally-speaking, preventing the "falling behind" routinely observed and measured in children living in low-income families.

No community interested in the health and welfare of its children can be without Reach Out and Read. Parents need and want guidance about reading with their very young children and they need and want quality children's books. Reach Out and Read fills this need and narrows the gap for the neediest families. The children deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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